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Killing Socrates: Exploring Platonic Influence in Apuleius'

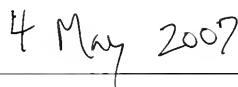
Metamorphoses

A Senior Honors Thesis in the Department of Classical Studies

Sweet Briar College

by Natalie Amelia Pye

Defended and Approved 18 April 2007

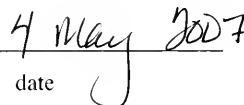
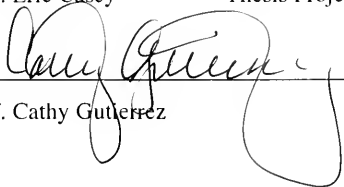


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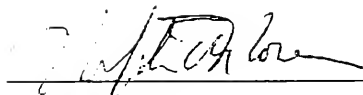
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**Killing Socrates: Exploring Platonic Influence in Apuleius'
*Metamorphoses***

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Prof. Ralph Rosen

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Introduction

In approximately 170 C.E., Apuleius, a lawyer and thinker from the Roman province of Madaurus, wrote the novel *Metamorphoses*. This fascinating work is one of two surviving Latin novels, telling the story of Lucius, a man whose curiosity leads him into both hilarious and horrifying encounters. While a superficial reading of the novel gives the impression of a purely light-hearted and irrelevant tale, Apuleius in fact uses Lucius and his story as an important means of addressing the Socratic dilemma and separating Socratic and Platonic thought. Apuleius employs Lucius' experience as an animal to paint a portrait of Platonic theory, particularly regarding the nature and make-up of the soul, clearly rejecting the asceticism preached by Plato's Socrates. In so doing, Apuleius articulates his own notion of philosophy's roots in the practical world of sensory and physical experience. He maintains that a philosopher need not be concerned solely with matters of thought while rejecting the physical realm, but instead can and should find a balance between the two. Modern scholarship has largely overlooked this aspect of the novel, but it has important potential for elucidating a unique perspective on Platonic doctrine.

A biography of Socrates begins by noting that there are two "historical figures whose influence on the life of humanity has been profoundest, Jesus and Socrates."¹ Despite his clear importance and extensive influence, the scholarly world knows surprisingly little about the man behind the Socratic method. His date of birth is unknown, though it is well documented that he was tried by the Athenian state and put to death in the year 399 B.C.E., when he was thought to be in his seventies. He was married

¹ Taylor, A. E. *Socrates*. Westport, CT. Greenwood Press, Publishers. 1951. 9.

and had children, but held little or no property. While he had many and powerful friends, the enemies he made through public humiliation eventually proved more numerous and more powerful. Most of these biographical details are gleaned from the works of his contemporaries, including followers like Xenophon and Plato, as well as from his detractors, such as the comedic playwright Aristophanes. Each depiction of the philosopher is different and blatantly biased, leaving the modern reader to cobble together general trends into a portrait of a man. This leads to obvious difficulties, particularly when considering Plato's collected Socratic Dialogues.

Plato was a loyal follower of Socrates and a great thinker in his own right. He 'recorded' Socrates' encounters with various interlocutors, ostensibly for the purpose of preserving and rehabilitating his mentor's reputation. Xenophon followed a similar *modus operandi*, but discrepancies between his and Plato's accounts of Socrates's life cannot be reconciled merely by different times and places of authorship. While Plato's dialogues present Socrates as introducing, for instance, the concept of the Forms, Xenophon gives no indication that Socrates ever mentioned these celestial and perfect ideas. This and other inconsistencies give rise to the great 'Socratic problem,' or the question of determining where Socrates ends and Plato begins.

For a period of time long after Socrates' death and the end of Plato's Academy, thinkers were content to combine the thoughts of Socrates, Plato, and other contemporary philosophers into a loosely configured group of philosophers, orators, and rhetoricians. This era in philosophic history is now called the Second Sophistic. Out of this mélange of thought arose, among others, a learned man from Madaurus named Apuleius. Born around 125 C.E. in a North African province of Rome, Apuleius traveled widely and

sampled the thoughts, languages, and religions of every region he visited. He was an attorney in the Roman court system, traveling throughout the empire and making a particular impact in Corinth, where the people of the city erected a statue of him. Despite this success, he was, much like Socrates, not without his own troubles with the law. In approximately 158 C.E., Apuleius' stepson, Sicinius Aemilianus, put him on trial, charging him with witchcraft, specifically for using it to woo his new wife, Pudentella. Apuleius also faced several minor accusations, such as possession of a mirror, the purchasing of fish, and the writing of salacious verses. While these charges sound absurd to a modern audience, the ancient audience lived in a world that believed in the daily threat of witchcraft and other nefarious sorcery. His proficiency as a speaker and as a thinker did not desert him and, as recorded in his *Apologia*, he skillfully refuted the charges. Success as an advocate, however, was only part of his life's work. A philosopher in his own right and a prolific writer, he composed verses, translated several of Plato's dialogues from Greek to Latin, wrote numerous philosophical texts in his own right, and combined all of these talents in the writing of his novel, *Metamorphoses*. The novel's significance is tremendous on several levels, partly because it is one of two surviving Latin novels, and partly because of the rich concepts within.

At an historical level, the novel is quite remarkable in depicting details of daily life in the Roman Empire. Further, it preserves examples of customs and mores as Lucius, the main character, has adventures and misadventures with witches, damsels in distress, generally unsavory characters, comedic lascivious ones, and more. Lucius'

troubles begin with his self-described *curiositas*,² a trait that causes him to pry into magical matters best left alone. In an unfortunate moment of experimentation while attempting to transform into a bird, Lucius is turned into a donkey. Frequent twists of fate prevent him from curing his ill-fated transformation by eating a rose, and he is stolen, sold, and given away across Greece until he finally reaches Corinth. The character's experience in an anima form provides the framework for probing many Platonic preoccupations about the nature of the soul. In the same city in which Apuleius himself found comfort and renown, Lucius appeals to various goddesses to rescue him, and is answered by Isis. His re-transformation into human form is followed by his conversion to the cult of Isis, giving one of few accounts, however scant, of the secret initiation rites to this or other mystery cults. Apuleius himself was a member of Isis' cult, marking one of many autobiographical details overlapping with the traits and experiences of his character.

Among the more intriguing elements of *Metamorphoses* are the many tantalizingly veiled references to Platonic thought. Apuleius was a thriving academic during the time of the Second Sophistic, and was heavily influenced by and undoubtedly familiar with Plato's writings. While he adhered to much of Platonic theory in writing *Metamorphoses*, particularly regarding the characteristics of the soul, he rejected the more Socratic elements of the dialogues, particularly the philosopher's notoriously hostile attitude towards bodily desires. He draws this distinction with both subtle and blatant allusions in both the *Apologia* and *Metamorphoses*. Within the novel he uses the scenario of a human soul trapped within an animal body to illustrate the faults and

² Many scholars suggest that Apuleius was responsible for either creating or developing the use of the word "*curiositas*."

injustice of drawing distinct judgment on a soul. By depicting Lucius as a donkey, a creature burdened by inherently ridiculous physical appearance, Apuleius places the narrator outside of the human system. As a result, Lucius is given a truly unique perspective on human activities, observing people behaving truly depraved or truly good, but behaving naturally in front of the presumed 'dumb' beast. Lucius retains a sense of himself throughout his experiences, even though he appears to be and is treated as an animal and slave. His journey and eventual conversion not only reflect Apuleius' own relationship with Plato and Socrates, but also reveals his views on such weighty matters as justice and the nature of the soul. A thorough understanding of Plato's vision of the soul, particularly as it relates to various aspects of justice, is absolutely vital for a responsible and cogent reading of the novel. The *Metamorphoses* is Apuleius' allegorical manifesto, partly autobiographical, partly drawing upon philosophical tenets, and partly pure entertainment.

Apuleius' *Apologia* and Platonic Allegiance

Strange as it may seem, to fully understand his novel, *Metamorphoses*, it is necessary to understand Apuleius' *Apologia*. These two works are linked closely in many respects, including Apuleius' trial experience, which comes to play in the trial scenes of *Metamorphoses*. Having been forced to defend himself in court, he has an experienced point of view when writing Lucius' defense in the third book. This and other episodes in the novel provide a forum for reflection on his opinions of the legal system at the time, as well as establishing a larger understanding of Apuleius' attitudes towards justice in terms of theodicy. Justice, discussed extensively in Plato's *Republic*, is also an important

recurring theme of *Metamorphoses*, as Lucius is frequently subjected to horrifying and abusive situations after his initial trauma of being transformed into a donkey. While it is frequently stated that his *curiositas*, or curiosity, got him into the difficult situation, one is left to wonder whether the punishment is suited to the crime, or if the eventual redemption by Isis is enough to make up for the abuses suffered. A key determinant in this discussion is Apuleius' views towards the separation of the soul and the body, particularly whether these distinctions follow those put forth by Plato. Understanding the *Apologia* elucidates Apuleius' attitude towards the Platonic Socrates, allowing the reader to determine the tone and thrust behind the *Metamorphoses*, and to better interpret the important themes of justice and the nature of the soul discussed therein.

Finding himself the victim of what he claims to be false accusations, Apuleius is forced to become his own lawyer. Protesting his innocence from the beginning of his speech, Apuleius notes the insidious nature of the charges, stating that "the charge of magic—[is] a charge with which it is easy to create a prejudice against the accused, but which it is hard to prove."³ Apuleius identifies strongly with his fellow philosophers, past and present, viewing the attack on his personal life as an affront to philosophy as a whole. He frames his case in no uncertain terms, determined to address "even the slightest slur" (§3) against himself and thus, against philosophy. Such hyperbole is not unusual in the arena of ancient public speaking, but what is significant is Apuleius' departure within his *Apologia* from Socratic thought and Socrates' own defense speech as recorded in Plato's *Apology*. The Athenian philosopher also found himself on trial facing charges that seemed based more on personal prejudices rather than

³ Apuleius (translated by H.E. Butler), *Apologia*. "Apuleius' Apology"
 <<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/apuleius/>>. University of Pennsylvania. 1996. §2

on an actual violation of the law. Unlike Plato's depiction of Socrates' *Apology*, in which Socrates attempted to appeal to a sense of justice among the jury, Apuleius concerns himself with thoroughly discrediting his prosecutors while repulsing each accusation, no matter how slight. While there are some similarities between the two defense speeches, it is clear from the content of his speech that Apuleius chooses to identify himself more with Plato than with Plato's Socrates.⁴ In mentioning philosophers' causes for persecution, Apuleius clearly differentiates between Plato and Socrates. While noting that he is not the only misunderstood philosopher to have faced false charges in court, he states that "it is a common and general error of the uninitiated to bring the following accusations against philosophers... while a similar suspicion attached to... the 'demon' of Socrates and the 'good' of Plato [among others]" (§27). In distinguishing here between Socrates' daimonion and Plato's highest form of 'the good,' Apuleius shows that the two thinkers are far from interchangeable, making his Platonic references appear even more firmly distanced from Socrates. In slighting his accusers, Apuleius invokes Plato rather than Socrates, stating that he "owe[s] something also to the advice of [his] master Plato, who [s]ays that those who make such investigations as these 'pursue a delightful form of amusement which they will never regret'" (§41). Apuleius' choice of the phrase, *Platone meo*, is particularly indicative of his relationship with Plato, as his "ultimate authority is referred to once again. The use of *meus* shows the speaker's exceptional intimacy with the philosopher's teachings. We may even say that he is claiming him for himself alone.

⁴ As previously mentioned, separating Plato from Socrates, particularly within the Platonic Dialogues, is a difficult task. However, for the purposes of this paper, it is notable that Apuleius seems to make a clear distinction between the two.

literally excluding the opponents: Plato is 'not yours.'⁵ This territorialism of Apuleius is somewhat reflective of the reverent attitude of an initiate, begging comparison to worship in a mystery cult. He further invites comparison to such inclusive worship when describing the joys of scholarship afforded by association with Plato:

But we of the family of Plato know naught save what is bright and joyous, majestic and heavenly and of the world above us. Nay, in its zeal to reach the heights of wisdom, the Platonic school has explored regions higher than heaven itself and has stood triumphant on the outer circumference of this our universe. Maximus [the judge] knows that I speak truth, for in his careful study of the *Phaedrus* he has read of the 'place being builded on heaven's back.' Maximus also clearly understands—I am now going to reply to your accusation about the name—who he is whom not I but Plato was first to call the 'King'. 'All things,' he says, 'depend upon the King of all things and for him only all things exist.' Maximus knows who that 'King' is, even the cause and reason and primal origin of all nature, the lord and father of the soul, the eternal saviour of all that lives, the unwearying builder of this world. Yet he builds without labour, yet he saves without care, he is father without begetting, he knows no limitation of space or time or change, and therefore few may conceive and nor may tell of his power. I will even go out of my way to aggravate the suspicion of sorcery; I will not tell you, Aemilianus, who it is that I worship as my king. Even if the proconsul should ask me himself who my god is, I am dumb. (§ 64-65)

This declaration serves many purposes, one of the most practical being the furthering of his relationship with the judge, Maximus. His entire trial strategy revolves around the dismissal of his accusers as ignorant, uninitiated, and jealous men who have falsely brought charges against him. By harping on his relationship with Plato and other esoteric entities, Apuleius sets himself above the accusers, making his disdain apparent. In Socrates' own *Apology* as told by Plato, he took a similar tactic, at times more politely dismissing his accuser, but making a literally fatal flaw. While both Socrates and Apuleius attempt to make themselves seem superior to their opposition, Apuleius wisely ensures that the judge who will determine his fate feels equally elevated rather than

⁵ Hunink, Vincent (ed.). *Apuleius of Madauros Pro Se De Magia; Volume II, Commentary*. Amsterdam. J.C. Gieben. 1997. Pg. 126.

disparaged. Apuleius' legal system works to his advantage, as there is only one highly educated person to convince of his innocence, while Socrates had to placate a large jury of ordinary citizens. Despite this fact, Socrates never could break his habit of tearing down his opponents, even when his life depended upon his ability to flatter them.

Apuleius seems to display allegiance to a variety of philosophical camps in the early stages of the *Apologia*, assuming elements of Socratic thought, Cynicism, and Platonism. He apparently adopts the dress of the Cynics, stating that "the staff and wallet are not, it is true, carried by the Platonic philosophers, but are the badges of the Cynic school" (§22). However, he eventually settles firmly in Plato's camp, a classification that is cemented in his disparaging comment towards the Cynics, demanding to know if it is "disgraceful for a philosopher who is no rude and unlearned person of the reckless Cynic type, but who remembers that he is a disciple of Plato, is it disgraceful for such a one to know and care for such learning or to be ignorant and indifferent?" (§39). This question marks the turning point in his speech. While he still mentions other philosophers, his most convincing arguments and most drawn-out analogies are directly linked to Plato, and Socrates is largely ignored. His overwhelming references to Plato reflect how deeply he has internalized the works and thoughts of Socrates' follower. He is clearly well versed in Plato's works, and makes particular use of relevant dialogues, playing on reverence for the philosopher when stating that "...you are to hear the very words that Plato wrote in his old age in the last book of the Laws... I am adjudged to have made admirable use of Plato, not only as a guide in life, but as an advocate in court, to whose laws, as you see, I obey" (§65). *Laws* is a particularly relevant book for Apuleius to cite, as Socrates does not appear at all in that dialogue. Apuleius is emphatic in the point that

his knowledge of the dialogue is no hollow exercise in mere memorization as was the craft of the hapless Socratic interlocutor, Ion. Instead, he is able to internalize and live the doctrine he studies.

Apuleius interestingly speaks of Plato in the terms of a mystery cult, much like the cult of Isis so prominent in the last book of *Metamorphoses*, stating that he will “say nothing of those lofty and divine Platonic doctrina, that are familiar to but few of the elect and wholly unknown to all the uninitiate” (§12).⁶ He somewhat undercuts this statement by explaining the duality of Venus and the different aspects of love, apparently willing on this occasion to elucidate this to the “uninitiate” present at his trial for his own self-preservation. However, it appears that his willingness to reveal Platonic doctrine does not extend to the secrets of “solemn ceremonies... for no thought of personal safety shall induce [him] to reveal to the uninitiated the secrets that [he has] received and sworn to conceal” (§56). His vagueness in referring to these “solemn ceremonies” is a clever calculation. While this statement leaves room for the ceremonies to be interpreted as being related to witchcraft, it is also easily interpreted as a reference to membership of any number of popular mystery religions. Thus Apuleius balances his image, establishing himself as a member of the Platonic intellectual elite, a role he will later use to win favor with the educated judge, and also maintains his piety and implies mainstream religious obligations.

⁶ In the *Phaedo*, Socrates compares the study of philosophy to be on a spiritual par with participation in mystery rites: “It is likely that those who established the mystic rites for us were not inferior persons but were speaking in riddles long ago when they said that whoever arrives in the underworld uninitiated and unsanctified will wallow in there mire, whereas he who arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods. There are indeed, as those concerned with the mysteries say, many who carry the thyrsus but the Bacchants are few. These latter are, in my opinion, no other than those who have practiced philosophy in the right way” (*Phaedo* 69c-d).

While the speeches of Apuleius and Socrates have similar beginnings, Apuleius diverges in his rhetorical path. One of Apuleius' first contentions, much like that of Socrates before him, is a blatantly false claim to poor oratorical skills, claiming that his "opponents need fear nothing from [his] eloquence" (§5). The Platonic Socrates, obviously responding to his prosecutors' warnings to the jury about his tricky speaking habits, similarly claims that he will "show [him]self not to be an accomplished speaker at all... unless indeed they call an accomplished speaker the man who speaks the truth. If they mean that, [he] would agree that [he is] an orator..." (*Apology*, 17a-b). Apuleius' physical appearance is also put on trial, his opponents apparently claiming that he had violated some philosophical stance by being attractive or by grooming excessively. He is quick to distinguish himself obliquely from the notoriously unattractive Socrates by stating that "philosophers are not forbidden to possess a handsome face," (§4) and by noting that he does not care about the appearance of his hair, putting in perspective that accusation "which they hurl against [him] as though it were a capital charge" (§4). While this may seem a frivolous exchange, it is key in establishing Apuleius' departure from Socrates and his ultimate philosophical alignment. The expectations of appearance vary among different times, places, and scenarios across the ancient world, but it was universally held that appearances revealed something about the character of that person. Maud Gleason notes the example of the sophist Philiscus who:

Gave offense by the way he walked and by the way he stood. His clothing seemed inappropriate and his voice quasi-feminine... his speech lazy careless and off the point. The emperor... finally exclaimed with displeasure, 'the hairstyle shows what sort of man he is, and the voice what sort of orator.' Thus it is not

surprising that many people considered the development of these variables too important to be left to chance.⁷

Apuleius claims that he does not take particular care in his appearance, sounding a great deal like Socrates and the Cynics after him, both of whom make a point of disinterest with the physical realm. This comment might create some dissonance as he claims not to care about his appearance, something held to be vital to public life. However, he mitigates this by mentioning his natural beauty, presumably compensating for his lack of grooming. Apuleius is playing both sides of the argument, defending his right to be disheveled or attractive. The discussion of his own beauty sets him further apart from Socrates, who was renowned for his ugliness and a particularly pugnacious nose.⁸ Ruby Blondell gives even more weight to Socrates' physical appearance in the context of Athenian society stating that:

The threat to contemporary behavioral norms betokened by Sokrates' transgressive appearance is clearly expressed by Kallikles, who views his activities as childish, slavish, and unmanly. The same view is reflected more vulgarly in the Aristophanic representation of the Sokratic intellectuals' pale and physically degenerate, if not outright *kinaidos* [lifestyles]... judged by many of the conventional criteria of manly excellence. Sokrates' physical deficiencies matched a life and death that were resounding failures.⁹

This statement, unsympathetic as it is, emphasizes the importance of self-presentation within an ancient oratorical context. Beauty and nobility were linked even in the word

⁷ Gleason, Maud. *Making Men; Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press. 1995. 84

⁸ The modern reader must take this assertion on faith, as no contemporary images or descriptions of the author exist. Socrates' beauty, or lack thereof, is well documented by his contemporaries, the most famous instance appearing in Alcibiades' speech during the *Symposium*. Paul Zanker's *The Mask of Socrates: The intellectual in Antiquity*," provides an interesting examination of this subject. (University of California Press, 1996)

⁹ Blondell, Ruby. *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues*. New York. Cambridge University Press. 2002. 71.

itself.¹⁰ He more closely associates physical and spiritual beauty in addressing the lack thereof in his accuser, stating "... I should not be surprised if you prefer me to speak of your ugly deformity of a face and to be silent about your morals, which are infinitely more repulsive than your features" (§16). Apuleius further makes note of the relationship between the body and soul, observing that "...the soul, like the body, goes lightly clad when in good health; weakness wraps itself up, and it is a sure sign of infirmity to have many wants... in this respect, I find, that the gods more especially surpass men, namely that they lack nothing: wherefore he of mankind whose needs are smallest is most like unto the gods" (§21). In the context of discussing his own lack of property, and perhaps even his lack of appropriate clothing at the trial, Apuleius reveals his very Platonic views of the soul. Apuleius' attitude towards the interconnection of the body and the soul is vital, not only for understanding his philosophical point of view during his trial, but also for a more complete understanding of themes within *Metamorphoses*.

Apuleius is also forced to deflect the charges of the lascivious nature of some of his verses, inspired, as he claims, by Plato's own poetry. It is during this section of his defense that Apuleius begins to identify strongly with Plato as a philosopher and fellow author. Apuleius' defense for writing provocative poetry is not quite so simple as it may appear. He first blames the allegedly inappropriate tone of his poetry largely on the prosecutor and his poor recitation, which "leaves no impression save one of disgust" (§9). While Apuleius swiftly proves that these poems are irrelevant to the charge of witchcraft, he continues with his defense, naming several other philosopher-poets, specifically Plato, upon whose poetry Apuleius' "verses were modeled... for the only

¹⁰ The Greek word *kalos* means "beautiful, noble."

verses of Plato now extant are love-elegies, the reason, I [Apuleius] imagine, being that he burned all his other poems because they were inferior in charm and finish" (§11). In this line of defense, he is attempting to align himself with old and venerated philosophers, the most notable in his mind being Plato. It is interesting that he places so much emphasis upon Plato's love poetry, as these are arguably his least famous writings and poetry one of his most obscure talents. This emphasis also serves as yet another example of Plato and Socrates' separation, as in *Republic*, Plato depicts Socrates as essentially banishing poetry in his ideal city. While Socrates may have disdained poetry, Plato, and Apuleius after him, apparently embraced it.

Apuleius' alignment with Socrates in his *Apologia* is limited to sparse overt mentions and more numerous subtle slights. As one of the charges brought against him is the possession of a mirror, apparently for some nefarious purpose, Apuleius sees fit to invoke Socrates. He demands of the audience,

Is not Socrates said actually to have urged his followers frequently to consider their image in glass, that so those of them that prided themselves on their appearance might above all else take care that they did no dishonour to the splendour of their body by the blackness of their hearts; while those who regarded themselves as less than handsome in personal appearance might take especial pains to conceal the meanness of their body by the glory of their virtue? You see; the wisest man of his day actually went so far as to use the mirror as an instrument of moral discipline (§15).

In this instance Socrates' own arguments are directly relevant to Apuleius' defense. Here again he diffuses a bizarre charge merely by stating plainly how truly irrelevant it is.

While Apuleius associates himself with Socrates when it suits his purposes, the majority of his references are more furtive digs at his predecessor. During his trial he is constantly emphasizing his own piety, sometimes directly referencing his own religious practices, other times distancing himself from Socrates' allegedly impious crimes. At one point he

proudly owns up to the charges that he worships a mysterious figurine, “as if it were not a worse offense to have nothing to worship at all” (§27). He further turns the tables on his accusers, putting Aemilianus in Socrates’ position, accusing him of not respecting the gods by claiming, “He has never prayed to any god or frequented any temple... [he is] called Mezenius, because he despises the gods” (§56). Here Apuleius is not so much addressing his own charges as charging his accuser. His reasons for doing so could vary; while Socrates might seem a logical figure for Apuleius to follow in his situation. Socrates famously lost his case, so Apuleius is perhaps trying to avoid association with failure. This does not prevent an ironically Socratic moment in his statement that “to instruct [the judge] would be presumption.” (§48), squarely in the middle of a very long instruction on nearly every subject under the sun. Socrates was famous for such self-effacing declarations, proclaiming ignorance and humility the moment before soundly schooling his interlocutor.

Apuleius’ trial and defense speech highlight several important aspects of his life, which plays a prominent role in *Metamorphoses*. Even though he is facing the same sort of prosecution as Socrates, his dismissal of the Athenian in favor of Plato is significant. Indeed, within all of Apuleius’ works “... the adjective *Platonicus* occurs only five times, all in the *Apologia*.”¹¹ By examining Apuleius’ association with Plato in his earlier works, one can establish his attitude towards Socrates, and thus the influence, or lack thereof, of both thinkers in *Metamorphoses*.

Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*: Book I

¹¹ Harrison, S.J. *Apuleius; A Latin Sophist*. New York, Oxford University Press. 2000. 255

The *Metamorphoses* is, on its surface, a mock-epic, comedic cautionary tale.

However, much like the main character, the surface is not necessarily indicative of the contents within. In tracing the journey of the narrator, Lucius, from man to donkey and back to man, Apuleius appears to be offering an entertaining yarn. The interpretation could certainly end there, but to do so would discount the abundant Platonic references within the novel, giving the story an entirely different and far weightier purpose. Apuleius tackles the themes of justice, the nature of the soul, the dilemma of curiosity, and contemporary religious practices, all of which become apparent when viewing the novel through a Platonic lens. Lucius, identifying himself as being born in Apuleius' hometown, introduces his tale as an amalgam of stories, including elements from Egypt, Rome, and Greece.¹² He quickly indicates that the story will be dealing with the supernatural, mentioning that he is traveling towards Thessaly, a well-known stronghold of witchcraft in the ancient world.¹³ His first interaction with his fellow travelers introduces his greatest vice of curiosity, for which he is 'punished' by being transformed into a donkey. Hearing two other men on the road laughing raucously about an outlandish tale ("'*Parce*' inquit '*in verba ista haec tam absurda tamque immania mentiendo*'") as the traveling companion instructs Aristomenes, "Stop telling such ridiculous and monstrous lies.")¹⁴, Lucius requests that they "let me in on this—not that I'm nosy, it's just that I'm the sort of person who likes to know everything, or at least as much as I can" (*Met.* 1.3). Lucius' relentless desire to know everything is, by its very nature, unfulfilling. This yearning for complete knowledge calls to mind the philosopher's similar

¹² *Metamorphoses* 1.1

¹³ Some of the more famous "witches" of antiquity come from Thessaly, lending the region an association with witchcraft that would have been immediately recognized by the ancient audience. This association is much like a similar one about liars being particularly prevalent in Crete, a characterization Odysseus made much of in his travels.

¹⁴ Apuleius (Translated by J. Arthur Hanson). *Metamorphoses*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA. 1989. 6-7.

quest for *sophia*, or wisdom, however the object of Lucius' desire is of a more prurient nature. Lucius' quest to fulfill his insatiable *curiositas* is, at several points of his journey, a nearly fatal character flaw. In this particular instance, Lucius himself is unharmed, but hears a cautionary tale that he should take to heart, but blithely ignores. Aristomenes, Lucius' new friend, tells his story of rediscovering his friend Socrates and the unfortunate events that transpire from this reunion. While this could be taken at face value as a gruesome tale of witchcraft, there are larger themes afoot. The prologue is vital to the entire composition of *Metamorphoses*, and the narrator himself alerts the reader to the richness of the text at the end of the prologue, commanding "*lector intende: laetaberis*" ("Pay attention Reader, and you will find delight)."¹⁵ This tale is important not only because it is the first one told, but also because of the clear Platonic and Socratic references, setting the tone for the rest of the novel.

Apuleius' use of Platonic texts is not strictly regimented and worshipful. Indeed, mirroring Plato's tendency to use his mentor's image for his own philosophical purposes, so too does Apuleius make fluid use of Platonic concepts. In his *Apologia*, it behooves him to make a strong and reverent connection to his philosophical predecessor, but Michael Trapp makes the valid point that the Platonic Socrates' warnings against frivolity and writing do not appear to work in Apuleius' favor.¹⁶ While there are certainly deeper meanings in *Metamorphoses*, the give and take between serious Platonic philosophical allegory and light storytelling allows Apuleius the academic association with the philosopher as well as the freedom to indulge in less intellectual storylines. For instance, Harrison argues that:

... Lucius and Apuleius seem to have a good deal in common... these resemblances do not require that the *Metamorphoses* should be read as a fictionalized

¹⁵ Apuleius (Translated by Hanson), 4-5

¹⁶ Trapp, Michael B. (Editors: Ahuria Kahane and Andrew Laird. *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*. "On Tickling the Ears: Apuleius' Prologue and the Anxieties of Philosophers." New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. 39-46.

autobiography... like many modern novelists, Apuleius is adapting elements of his own life and experience in order to make the characterization of his first-person protagonist more realistic and effective, and to set him in his own contemporary cultural background.¹⁷

Such an interpretation, however, takes the novel out of its ancient context. While there is surely interplay between the author and his character's lives, Harrison's interpretation of the narration seems anachronistic. Indeed, "the realistic modern novel not only portrays a recognizable society but explores the richness and conflicts within the thoughts and feelings of an individual. This is not true of the *Metamorphoses*."¹⁸ Harrison's swift dismissal of narratological complexity in the novel is indicative of his tendency to discount the deeper influence of Platonic themes throughout the novel. A reader who fails to allow for both serious philosophical implications and purely entertaining digressions fails to fully appreciate the range of Apuleius' talent and the richness of the text.

The first book of the *Metamorphoses* establishes Lucius' attitude towards Socrates and sets a tone for his subsequent adoption of Platonic themes. Apuleius introduces his Socrates within the context of Aristomenes' story of murder and witchcraft. If naming a character "Socrates" were not enough of a hint to the reader that Apuleius is referencing Plato, he includes plenty of clues in the rest of the story. Aristomenes comes upon his old friend at "... the public baths... sitting on the ground, half wrapped in a tattered old coat... looking just like one of those bits of Fortune's flotsam one sees begging in the streets," (*Met.* I. 6) a clear reference to the Platonic Socrates' habit of not caring for his appearance as well as his penchant for lingering at the baths and gymnasiums while striking up debates. Aristomenes, shocked to discover

¹⁷ Harrison, 217-218

¹⁸ Schlam, Carl C. *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press. 1992. 10.

his battered friend whom all had presumed to be dead, exclaims that he does, indeed, “look... like a ghost,” (*Met.* 1.6) lingering between life and death. Further similarities between Plato and Apuleius’ Socrates emerge as Aristomenes nurses his friend back to health, endeavoring to “*Lectulo refoveo, cibo satio, poculo mitigo, fables permulceo*. (I put him to rest with a bed, filled him with food, relaxed him with wine, and soothed him with talk).”¹⁹ Aristomenes makes use of palliative speech, bringing comfort merely by talking, forecasting the important theme of speech that Lucius, as a ‘dumb’ beast shortly encounters himself. After a while, Aristomenes notices that Socrates is acting like his old self, “beginning to talk freely, to crack the odd joke, even to get mildly flippant and answer back” (*Met.* 1.7). This behavior is certainly indicative of Plato’s Socrates and his propensity for flippancy. The Apuleian Socrates begins to relate his story, lamenting that “it [is] only because I went in search of a bit of pleasure... that I got into this dreadful mess,” (*Met.* 1.7), referring partly to Socrates’ frequent condemnation of bodily pleasure, at least in theory, as well as to his disdain for all things relating to the physical world he so resents. These similarities are impossible to discount as mere coincidence, especially considering Apuleius’ intimate knowledge of Plato’s dialogues and thus his familiarity with the Platonic character of Socrates.²⁰ This connection proves vital to the events that follow, most specifically to Socrates’ grisly murder.

Socrates is in such decrepit condition due to his recent escape from Meroe, his ex-lover and a powerful witch who is determined not to take lightly being jilted. Fearful of her powers, Socrates urges Aristomenes not to speak ill of Meroe, in case her

¹⁹ Apuleius (Translated by Hanson), 14-15.

²⁰ Apuleius translated several Platonic dialogues, including the *Phaedo*. This dialogue is particularly concerned with the nature of the soul in relation to the body, a particularly prescient theme in *Metamorphoses*.

preternatural abilities should allow her to hear the slur and find him. His fears are unfortunately realized that night when Meroe and her sister, Panthea, break down the door to exact punishment. Whether or not this punishment is just alters the entire tone of this encounter. While the sisters burst into the room appearing at first to be stereotypical hags, they are “creeping into the room in the middle of the night, one carrying a lighted lamp, the other a sponge and a naked sword” (*Met.* 1.12). The sword, while an accessory to Socrates’ murder, is also frequently associated with Dike, the Greek goddess of justice, bringing an interesting religious tone to her actions. Meroe is seeking to punish Socrates for “scorn[ing her] love,” (*Met.* 1.12) leaving her “to play abandoned Calypso to his wily Ulysses, left to mourn in perpetual solitude” (*Met.* 1. 12). She sees herself as the injured party, entirely justified in punishing Socrates as she has punished other unfaithful lovers in the past, acting on the hurt feelings and broken hearts that other rejected women of mythology bore silently or turned upon themselves. Her actions are an interesting reversal of Vergil’s Dido after Aeneas abandons the Carthaginian queen to found Rome. Instead of killing herself, she turns the sword on the perpetrator, removing his heart as payment for the damage she claims that he has done to her own. In this sense Meroe is similar to the Furies, gruesomely embodying a harsh sense of justice.

Meroe’s actual murder of Socrates is executed like a sacrifice perverted by its victim’s humanity, suggesting further religious connotations on the affair. She approaches Socrates, still calm and asleep in bed and, “...twisting Socrates’ head to one side she buried her sword up to the hilt in the left-hand side of his throat, catching the blood that spurted out in a leather bottle so neatly that not a drop was spilled... plunged her hand into the wound right down to his entrails, rummaged about, and pulled out [his] heart...blocking the gaping

wound with her sponge” (*Met.* I.13). Aristomenes even notes that Meroe appears to make an effort “to keep as closely as possible to the sacrificial forms,” (*Met.* I.13), allowing for several possible interpretations. Meroe is intentionally twisting the traditional sacrificial rites, either to illustrate her alignment with evil, to invite speculation that she is justified in murdering her runaway lover, or, when read with a mind to Apuleius’ opinions of Plato, as an allegorical critique of Socratic views. That Apuleius’ Socrates is intended to invoke Plato’s Socrates is evident, and thus his dramatic murder is obviously Apuleius’ attempt to convey something of his attitude towards the philosopher.

The importance of the heart in the cosmic makeup of the body and soul is explored in Plato’s *Timaeus*. This dialogue contains a seemingly original creation myth, describing the gods as crafting mankind with each organ serving as a vital cog of the psychic machine.

Within these parameters, the heart is:

...Guardhouse [of the soul-filled body, ensuring that] if spirit’s might should boil over at a report from reason that some wrongful act involving these members is taking place—something being done to them from outside or even something originating from the appetites within—every bodily part that is sensitive may be keenly sensitized through all the narrow vessels, to the exhortations or threats and so listen and follow completely (*Timaeus* 70 b).

Meroe sees fit to remove this organ that is vital not only to corporeal conduct, but also to the balance and wellbeing of the soul. The fact that the heart is responsible for balance, particularly in calming physical appetites, may serve as a commentary on the habits and beliefs of Plato’s Socrates who viewed the body as a prison for the soul, preventing it from achieving unity with the divine.²¹ Though he railed against physical pleasures as a distraction from the important work of philosophers, he did not abstain entirely. He was

²¹ As Socrates asks in the *Phaedo*, “Is [death] anything else than the separation of the soul from the body?” (*Phaedo*, 64c), and later muses “our soul must of necessity exist elsewhere before us, before it was imprisoned in the body?” (*Phaedo* 92a).

married with several children, implying familiarity with heterosexual relations, and his reputation for pursuing young boys may imply, despite protestations to the contrary, that he did not abstain from those relationships either. Plato's *Symposium* depicts Socrates clearly enjoying the pleasures of good food, company, and wine, able to imbibe more than the rest of the dinner party. By removing Socrates' heart, Meroe removes the spiritual check against the sort of behavior Plato's Socrates shuns, but she replaces it with a sponge, an item not without significance in *Timaeus*. According to the dialogue, while creating man:

The gods foreknew that the pounding of the heart (which occurs when one expects what one fears or when one's spirit is aroused) would, like all such swelling of the passions, be caused by fire. So they devised something to relieve the pounding: they implanted lungs, a structure that is first of all soft and without blood and that secondly contains pores bored through it like a sponge... that, then, is why they cut the passages of the windpipe down to the lungs and situated the lungs round the heart like padding, so that when spirit within the heart should reach its peak, the heart might pound against something that gives way to it and be cooled down. By laboring less, it might be better able to join spirit in serving reason (*Timaeus*, 70c-d).

With her actions Meroe is, in a sense, taking on the role of a god, editing the soul by removing the element that senses threats and replacing it with an element that enables the lesser earthly soul to strive for the loftier functions of the divine soul in the mind. Such a reading would invite comparison to Diotima, certainly the most developed female character in Plato's dialogues who, like Meroe, possesses some suspiciously supernatural abilities, though Diotima tends to put her powers to use for the greater good. Socrates tells his audience at the *Symposium* that Diotima was wise enough to have instructed him about the nature of love, but that her wisdom goes beyond "many things besides [love]; once she even put off the plague by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make" (*Symposium*, 201d). While Apuleius' Socrates "scorns [Meroe's] love," (*Met.* 1.12),

Diotima scolds Plato's Socrates for his initial dismissal of her understanding of love. Telling him to "watch [his] tongue," (*Symposium*, 202a) Diotima admonishes him because he has not "found out yet that there's something in between wisdom and ignorance... [This is] judging things correctly without being able to give a reason... correct judgment, of course, has this character: it is *in between* understanding and ignorance" (*Symposium* 202a). This concept of being "in between" is wonderfully reflexive not only of the roles of Diotima and Meroe, both of whom are women with unusual powers making them difficult to categorize as either humans or gods, but also of Socrates himself. After Meroe murders him, he is in a state somewhere between life and death, lacking blood or a heart, but still animated and in possession of his soul and senses. Apuleius kills Socrates in the beginning of the novel, taking unequivocally drastic action against a character with a significant name. Because his death is not complete at first, Apuleius may be conveying his own occasional wavering opinion about the character. However, after the witches attack him, Socrates is a hollow puppet, able to walk and talk, but not truly alive, suggesting that Apuleius may have believed the same of Plato's character.

On Justice

It is impossible to entertain a discussion of *Metamorphoses* without addressing the issue of justice. The question not only of the nature of justice, but also of whether it can be found in the courts, is a permeating theme tying together the lives of Socrates, Plato, Apuleius, and the character Lucius. The Greeks believed justice to be personified in the deity Dike, but understood that divine justice is not always consistent with human

needs or desires. The question of theodicy, or the justice of the gods, deeply affects not only the religious convictions of the average citizen, but also larger philosophical tenets, cutting a swath of influence through the ages and influencing the development of the justice system. Plato's most famous discussion of the subject is found in the *Republic* in which Socrates discusses with several interlocutors the nature of Justice as a Form. With such a broad topic, it is a small wonder that an essential definition proves so elusive, however several definitions that prove insufficient are actually quite indicative of Plato and the ancient world's views towards justice. Socrates' real world encounter with justice in action resulted in his death sentence, seen in the *Apology*. Apuleius' own run-in with the law, while ending better for him than for Socrates, is also important to examine particularly in light of his successful career as an advocate, weaving his way through the Roman court system. It is likely that Apuleius drew upon his own experience, as well as Plato's discussions of justice, in illustrating Lucius' unfortunate false trial in book three of *Metamorphoses* in which justice is literally made a laughingstock in the name of religion.

Plato's *Republic* is an almost epic dialogue, spanning ten books and even more conceptions of the form of Justice. Socrates' first interaction is with Cephalus, a wealthy older man who is first to broach the topic in his discussion of "how people who've been unjust here [while alive] must pay the penalty [in Hades]" (*Republic*. I. 330d). Socrates is quick to begin an analysis of the term, asking if one is "to say unconditionally that it is speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred? Or is doing these things sometimes just, sometimes unjust?" (*Republic*. I.331c). His qualifications lead to a more refined, but still not ideal, definition. Cephalus, representing an older generation

possessing more traditional mores, views justice as a means to punish people who lack that quality. This attitude is best summarized in one of his final conceptions of justice being “that it is just to treat well a friend who is good and to harm an enemy who is bad” (*Republic* I. 335a). This sense of self-preservation and defensiveness is reflected in dramatic attitudes towards justice, particularly evident in *Medea* in which the title character declares her own view of justice, declaring that she will be “a millstone/ around my enemies’ necks, a boon to my friends.”²² These views represent a reaction towards changes in society and in schools of thought embodied by the sophistic movement, an anxiety made exceedingly clear in Aristophanes’ comedy *Clouds*.²³ In an ironic twist, Thrasymachus, Socrates’ next interlocutor, is a young man who takes the philosopher to task for his tricky and sophistic argument style, contradicting the stereotype of contemporary Greek youths, generally susceptible to the charms of the sophists. Their battle of wits and the ensuing chapters prove inconclusive, as Socrates closes the first book with the declaration that he “know[s] nothing, for when I don’t know what justice is, I’ll hardly know whether it is a kind of virtue or not, or whether a person who has it is happy or unhappy” (*Republic* I. 354c). Through Socrates Plato pursues a different tactic and “in books II-X Socrates no longer searches for the truth by criticizing his interlocutors’ ideas, he proceeds nonetheless in a spirit of exploration and discovery, proposing bold hypothesis and seeking their confirmation in the first instance through examining their consequences” (Cooper, p. 972). Socrates eventually determines that a

²² Euripides (Transl. by Stephen Esposito). *Euripides: Five Plays; Medea, Hippolytus, Heracles, Bacchae*. Newburyport, MA. Focus Publishing and R. Pullins & Company, 2002. Pg. 68, Lines 808-809.

²³ Mary Blundell’s book *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (New York. Cambridge University Press. 1989) offers an in depth exploration of this theme.

sufficient definition of justice is a fairly laissez-faire societal interaction, with each person acting of his or her own accord, not affecting others. Despite this eventual and unpractical definition, the dialogue leaves the reader with a deep sense of disquietude in the knowledge that Plato's ideal city is unlikely at best and, if achieved, not palatable for many. *Republic* is perhaps most useful in illustrating the truly slippery nature of justice in the hands of men.

Socrates' perception of justice within the *Apology* is similar to that of Cephalus' mindset, addressing consequences his actions deserve. While the jury has convicted him and his prosecutor requests the death penalty, Socrates indirectly criticizes the overly punitive nature of this demand. He addresses the jury, asking:

What counter-assessment should I propose to you, men of Athens? Clearly it should be a penalty I deserve, and what do I deserve to suffer or to pay because I have deliberately not led a quiet life but have neglected what occupies most people...what do I deserve for being such a man? Some good, men of Athens, if I must truly make an assessment according to my deserts, and something suitable. (*Apology* 36b-d)

His counter-offer, what he views as just payment for essentially keeping safe wisdom and morality, including free meals for life. He is well aware that such a suggestion will not be amenable to the jury, and is merely goading them to point out how unreasonable they are. He is further dissatisfied with the Athenian legal process, noting that he and the jury "have talked together but a short time. If it were the law with us, as it is elsewhere, that a trial for life should not last one but many days, you would be convinced, but now it is not easy to dispel great slanders in a short time" (*Apology* 37a-b). This statement in conjunction with his analysis of the numbers of the votes indicates that, while he will die to uphold and strengthen the state, he does not necessarily agree with its proceedings. As a philosopher he is, by his own description, deeply committed to seeking out wisdom and

knowledge of the Forms, among which Justice is highly esteemed. While he may aspire to this lofty goal, he is fully aware that the Athenian court is far from the ideal embodiment of Justice. He knows that there is no earthly court suited to try him and, should such a suitable court exist, he would not be brought to trial. He must adjust his expectations accordingly, and resigns himself to the fact that Athens is determined to execute him, thus making his trial one more opportunity to educate his fellow citizens. In the *Crito* he explains to his friend that, even though the state is unjust in convicting him, he would be more unjust in thwarting the unspoken social contract between citizens and a city-state.²⁴ In this way, Plato shows Socrates as choosing the lesser of two evils, obeying earthly laws and thus upholding celestial values.

Socrates' irreverent comments and deliberately bold counter-offer work against him as the jury settles on the death penalty, prompting yet another speech. He ostensibly forgives the jurymen for convicting him, implying that their conviction is based on the inferior logic of the accusers, much like that of Cephalus, in that they "thought they were hurting me and for this they deserve blame," (*Apology* 41d-e). Socrates requests that the jurymen serve justice, giving the following reasons:

When my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you, if you think they care for money or anything else more than they care for virtue, or if they think they are somebody when they are nobody. Reproach them as I reproach you, that they do not care for the right things and think they are worthy when they are not worthy of anything. If you do this, I shall have been justly treated by you, and my sons also. (*Apology* 41d-42)

²⁴ Socrates states: "your country is to be honored more than your mother, your father and all your ancestors, that it is more to be revered and more sacred, and it counts for more among the gods and sensible men, that you must worship it, yield to it and placate its anger more than your father's? You must either persuaded it or obey its orders and endure in silence whatever it instructs you to endure... you must obey. To do so is right..." (*Crito* 51a-b+).

Thus he chooses to answer what he believes a just action to be, not just during a rhetorical exercise or debate among friends, but even when his life is coming to its end and when he is confronted by injustice.

Apuleius' own career as a lawyer, dealing with questions of justice on a daily basis, as well as his experience as a defendant likely predisposed him to no small amount of cynicism on the subject. His mixed attitude towards religion and justice is perfectly illustrated in the third book of *Metamorphoses*, in which poor Lucius, not yet a donkey, is the victim of a cruel religious festival. This entire episode is an exercise in the absurd and the ironic, setting the stage for his future misadventures. Made to think that he has killed three men and is being tried on capital charges of murder, Lucius is beside himself with grief and fear, but manages to compose himself to give his own defense speech. Lucius is accused of the double crime of being "a criminal polluted by repeated murders, caught red handed, [and he is also] a foreigner" (*Met.* 3.3). Believing he acted in defense of his host in 'murdering' the three interlopers, Lucius is disturbed by his apparently inevitable doom, but mostly by the constant and uproarious laughter of the crowd.²⁵ After a heartfelt explanation of his actions, an affirmation of his law-abiding nature, and an appeal for mercy, Lucius is overcome:

I ended my plea by again bursting into tears and stretching my hands out in supplication, invoking the people's pity and everything they held most dear, imploring now this group, now that in my wretchedness. Then, when I thought their sympathies had been aroused and their pity stirred by my tears, I called the eyes of the Sun and of Justice to witness, and was just committing my fate to divine Providence, when I happened to look up and found that everybody in sight was helpless with laughter...²⁶

²⁵ In ancient literature, particularly in epic and tragedy, laughter is frequently cruel. The Roman reader would have been very aware of this fact, likely anticipating the cruel twist of fate in store for Lucius.

²⁶ *Metamorphoses*, 3.7

Lucius is scandalized by the crowd's laughter at his appeal to Justice, and particularly by his host's participation. Poor Lucius is almost more insulted that Milo, his host,²⁷ fails to appreciate that his actions were done out of defense for his host's home and person. This provides perhaps the most splendid failure of Milo to uphold the obligations of *xenia*,²⁸ far more detrimental than his other shortcomings as a host. When the truth is revealed, showing that Lucius has 'murdered' three wineskins instead of robbers, the magistrates, interestingly officers of the court and not priests, try to soothe the subject of the trick telling him:

This diversion, which we ceremoniously stage every year as a public tribute to the kindly god of Laughter, always relies on some fresh stroke of invention for its success. You, as both author and actor of his rites, will from now on wherever you go enjoy his favour and loving companionship; he will never let you suffer and grief in your heart but will always make glad your countenance in serenity and grace.²⁹

While Lucius accepts the fact that he has been duped in the name of a religious festival, he cannot help but feel the sting of shame. This pain and embarrassment is compounded by the utter falsehood of the magistrates' assurances, as Lucius will soon be in near constant "suffer[ing] and grief in [his] heart" (*Met.* 3.11). It is almost as though the magistrates, after bringing a close to one cruel joke at Lucius' expense, set up the next and even more elaborate torturous experience. Like Apuleius, Lucius is unjustly accused of a crime he clearly did not commit and ultimately is not punished. However, this begs the question of the justice of his transformation into and turmoil as a donkey. Like the

²⁷ Lucius frequently comments on Milo's poor manners as a host, often being stingy with food or entirely withholding meals.

²⁸ *Xenia* is the ancient Greek concept of being both a good host and a good guest. They believed that these relations were sacred to Zeus and failure to uphold either end would earn the wrath of the king of the gods. This concept is a particularly strong theme in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

²⁹ *Metamorphoses* 3.11

religious reprieve after his first humiliation, his conversion to Isis in the eleventh book seems to be cold and questionable comfort.

Animals, Bodies, and Souls

While reading Lucius' odyssey as a commentary on animal rights would incorrectly force modern concerns and theories on an ancient text, there is clearly a complicated interplay not only between man and animal but also between body and soul. Richard Sorabji notes, "the Platonist Apuleius gives a vivid depiction of an animal's suffering in *The Golden Ass*. But this is a *human* turned animal, and the message is not one of animal welfare in general."³⁰ However this seems to oversimplify the hardships Lucius faces. His journeys as a donkey are contributions to his soul's assumed enlightenment, thanks to Isis.³¹ However, whether or not this enlightenment is real or worthwhile is subject to debate, hinging on the quality of his experiences leading up to and following his conversion. As a man turned into an animal, he is in a bizarre liminal state, prompting discussion on the perception of animal as well as human souls. Egyptian gods, with whom Apuleius is unquestionably familiar and may have worshipped himself, similarly walked the line between human and animal appearance, but in their case they are divine, the quality or existence of their souls unquestioned by humans.

Animals in the ancient world were both given and denied souls depending on the thinker, but Plato, while not entirely consistent throughout the dialogues, tended to

³⁰ Sorabji, Richard. *Animal Minds and Human Morals: the Origins of the Western Debate*. Ithaca, New York. Cornell University Press. 1993. 209

³¹ Interestingly, as Lucius prepared himself for each initiation rite, he "submitted myself to abstinence from animal food, and indeed in my voluntary continence I considerably exceeded the ten days prescribed by the immemorial law. [...]*statim sacerdoti meo relatis quae videram, inanimate protinus castimoniae iugum suebo et lege perpetua prae-scriptis illis decem diebus...*" (*Met.* 11.30).

believe that they possessed souls of a status between human and plant. He even allowed for the possibility that an animal soul may see the Forms, as the “soul of an animal can pass at a future incarnation into a man, provided it has in the past seen, and therefore can recollect, the Forms.”³² Thus some animals may eventually see the Forms, achieving what Plato believes only well educated and truth-seeking philosophers can do through a lifelong pursuit. This begs the question of perception versus analysis; namely, can animals only perceive and store away a mental impression of these Forms in order to pass that recollected memory to a future human host of their soul? Or, in order to have truly perceived the Forms, must they have *comprehended* them, thus implying that animals have an understanding of, among other things, Justice? According to some:

Animals are said to exercise justice, or display a sense of justice and injustice, not only towards ourselves, but also towards each other. Aristotle had denied that animals had any sense (*aesthesis*) of justice and injustice, because they did not have speech. But his pupil Eudemus is credited with many examples to the contrary... all of these examples seem to involve a sense of oneself or another being wronged... in crediting animals with too much sense, Eudemus is closer to Plato than to Aristotle. For Plato compares the spirit (*thumos*) of a man who thinks himself wronged (*adikeisthai*) with a shepherd’s dog.³³

Aristotle’s line of thinking presents an interesting problem for Lucius the ass, as he is obviously capable of rationalization and thought, but not, as he discovers immediately after his transformation, of speech. Indeed, after he takes the potion he quickly realizes that, “I was not a bird but an ass, I tried to complain at what Photis had done to me. But I was now deprived of the human faculties of gesture and speech [*sed iam humano gestu simul et voce privates*]; all I could do by way of silent reproach was to droop my lower lip and with tearful eyes give her a sidelong look” (*Met.* III.25). According to Aristotle,

³² Sorabji, 62 (*Phaedrus* 249b-c).

³³ Sorabji, 120-121

the loss of speech would remove Lucius from classification as a human, however he “still preserved [his] human faculties” (*Met.* III.26), including his sense of justice and injustice, which is tested almost immediately. Lucius’ first encounter with another animal, ironically his own horse, is far from an expression of animal camaraderie:

I imagined that if dumb animals shared a silent comradeship bestowed by nature, that horse of mine would register some acknowledgement and pity for me, and would offer me hospitality and a decent lodging... that reputable mount of mine and the ass put their heads together and plotted my destruction... scarcely had they spotted me approaching the stall when they laid back their ears, and with flying hooves launched a frenzied attack on me. I was forced back as far as possible from the barley which earlier that evening I had set down with my own hands in front of that most grateful serving-animal of mine.... There I reflected on the arrogance of my fellow-beasts, and I planned revenge on my disloyal horse next day. (*Met.* III. 26)

Lucius obviously feels that the animals have acted unjustly towards him, and he, as an animal, plots revenge according to his views of justice. Similarly, he ascribes logical reasoning, communication, and planning to the animals in their “plot” against him. Such qualities imply that, though Lucius is not enough of an animal to communicate with or to be accepted by the horse and ass, these animals do not suffer a lack of resources themselves. Indeed, according to Plato, animals are not entirely without the power of thought, or even the ability to hold beliefs, or *doxai*. In *Timaeus*, he determines that plants are not animals because they lack that very quality:

[The gods] made another mixture and caused another nature to grow, one congenial to our human nature though endowed with other features and other sensations, so as to be a different living thing. These are now cultivated trees, plants and seeds, taught the art of agriculture to be domesticated for our use...we may call these plants ‘living things’ on the ground that anything that partakes of life has an incontestable right to be called a ‘living thing.’ And in fact, what we are talking about now partakes of the third type of soul, the type that our account has situated between the midriff and the navel. This type is totally devoid of opinion, reasoning or understanding, though it does share in sensation, pleasant and painful, and desires... Hence it is alive, to be sure, and unmistakably a living thing, but it stays put, standing fixed and rooted, since it lacks self-motion.³⁴

³⁴ *Timaeus* 77a-c

Thus plants lack beliefs and cogent thought, and are contrasted with humans and the quality of reasoning, associated with speech.

Speech, however, is not the sole determining factor for possessing the quality of beliefs. For instance, in “one interpretation (the commonest), Plato is explicitly talking about animals when he says in the *Republic* that a precarious form of true belief can be found in the nature of a beast and a slave.”³⁵ Slaves, as humans, obviously possess the power of speech but, according to Plato, lack the ability to differentiate between belief and reason. The 1st century BCE writer Varro had beliefs along these lines, drawing a fine line between human slaves, farm animals, and farming tools: “*The instruments by which the soil is cultivated*: Some men divide these into three categories: (1) articulate instruments, i.e., slaves; (2) inarticulate instruments, i.e., Oxen; and (3) mute instruments, i.e., carts...”³⁶ Thus animals have a soul and are capable of belief and of seeing the Forms, but are not capable of rational thought or speech, leaving Lucius languishing somewhere in between human and animal by possessing important characteristics of both species. However, Lucius’ most notable animal characteristic is his physical body, which is obviously not reflective of the content of his mind or soul, but results in his inability to speak, making him another member of the tradition of liminal animal characters.

The importance of speech as a factor of social categorization cannot be understated in a discussion of *Metamorphoses*. Catherine Osborne argues that Plato, in addition to fellow philosophers Pythagoras and Empedocles, attempts “to persuade us to see our fellow creatures as members of our own family, creatures with the same

³⁵ Sorabji, 11

³⁶ Varro (Transl. by Jo-Ann Shelton). “*On Agriculture* 1.17.1, 3-5.7.” *As the Romans Did; A Sourcebook in Roman Social History, Second Edition*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1998. 172.

capacities and origins as ourselves, though perhaps sadly degraded and corrupted.”³⁷

However, such a view seems too anachronistic, in a way forcing modern strains of philosophy upon an incongruous ancient mode of thinking. Surely if this was the goal of these thinkers, they would have spoken more plainly and frequently on the subject. I propose that the truth lies somewhere between Osborne’s interpretation and the actual text. While Plato opines that human souls are linked, perhaps even inseparable from those of animals, it is unlikely that he is making this point in the interest of starting or supporting an animal welfare movement. It is a realization that the animal and human kingdoms share a common origin, but his inherently anthropocentric attitude will not permit him to accede to a worldview in which animals and humans have the same “rights.” Indeed, Sorabji notes that the concept of “rights” as modern society has it, is indeed a modern idea. The concept that each person had an inherent claim to such liberties as speech, press, and religion would have been entirely foreign to ancient societies that regularly practiced slavery. Further, the ancients had no compunctions in creating story hierarchies of personhood, as in Aristotle’s *Politics* in which slaves and women are not as human as male citizens. Indeed, relatively recent American history proves the difficulty of reconciling the institutions of slavery with founding principles of “liberty and justice for all.” Despite several assorted outbursts in favor of humane treatment of animals, the ancient world largely took for granted that animals were essentially slaves furnished by the gods for human use. Such a view came from a long mythological tradition in which animals generally fulfilled a subservient role.

³⁷ Osborne, Catherine. *Dumb Beasts & Dead Philosophers: Humanity and the Humane in Ancient Philosophy & Literature*. New York. Oxford University Press. 2007. 61.

Several ancient authors, among them Homer, Hesiod, and Plato, probed this relationship between humans and animals, as well as mythical talking animals. The concept of animal and human interaction was an integral part of “a [mythical] golden age, before the tripartite division of gods, men, and animals became necessary, in which animals could converse with humans.”³⁸ John Heath maintains that the original and most important distinction between man and beast was, and remains, the power of speech. Particularly within ancient societies in which rhetorical skills were unquestionably necessary to be of any influence whatsoever and in which writing was limited to a miniscule demographic of educated elites and scholars, the ability to speak would have had tremendous influence on daily life. This power is often taken for granted until it is taken away, and the inevitable dehumanizing that goes along with that loss is chronicled in many myths including that of unfortunate Ovidian Io, Daphne, and most relevantly, Lucius. Io and Lucius share a particularly pitiful moment when attempting to speak, Io, whose name comes out as a cow’s lowing, and Lucius, as he attempts to bring an end to “outrageous lengths of unnatural depravity...and tried to shout ‘Romans’³⁹, to the rescue!’; but the other letters and syllables failed me and all that came out was an ‘O’—a good loud one, creditable to an ass.”⁴⁰ Thus Lucius, though still maintaining most of his human outrage and recognition of right and wrong, as well as a moral obligation to stop

³⁸ Heath, John. *The Talking Greeks: Speech, Animals, and the Other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2005. 12.

³⁹ There is some scholarly debate as to the narrator’s nationality, a confused affair mainly thanks to the prologue in which he lays claim on a variety of different genres. This particular invocation of Roman brotherhood seems to indicate that, even though the character may be in Greece, he may identify himself as a Roman citizen. This is also an interesting distinction as, in his own mind, while he is an animal, he retains his claim on Roman citizenship, particularly in this episode.

⁴⁰ *Metamorphoses* 8.29

wrongdoing, is hampered by his animal state. Because he lacks speech, his full participation in society is restricted. According to Heath:

The silence of beasts provided the cultural backdrop against which the Greeks played out their particular visions of what makes a life worth living for humans. This difference between other animals and us was *not* originally thought to be that we possessed rationality, despite what the fourth- and third-century philosophers would have us believe. The primacy of reason as a distinguishing criterion derived over time from the far more obvious fact of experience that beasts do not speak... eventually, this lack of speech was connected with irrationality, but that association was a later and secondary philosophical embellishment.⁴¹

Thus Plato and Socrates walked on the border in philosophical attitudes towards animals, a liminal and limited theoretical area reflected in Plato's own lack of a consistent attitude towards the abilities, and therefore the importance, of animals. The lack of speech is not an unimportant general distinction, but it fails to take into account instances in which humans lose this ability. If this traditional categorical requirement were to be taken literally, then people who suffer strokes or encounter any manner of medical mishaps resulting in the loss of speech would be relegated to the status of beasts.⁴² Such a categorization bodes ill for Lucius who, like those whose bodies refuse to cooperate with their minds in expressing themselves, is trapped in a grey area of humanity and society.

Lucius' transformation into a donkey is sometimes considered to be a form of punishment for his previous sins, including *curiositas* and an overweening interest in the world of physical pleasures. Osborne observes

...it may be either a result of *bodily* deficiencies, which contingently restrict the soul's ability to fulfill its potential... or it may be a temporary incapacity on the part of a soul suffering from moral corruption, in such a way as to inhibit understanding. As a punishment for neglect of philosophy, the dullard may have been banished to the body of a centipede...⁴³

⁴¹ Heath, 5-6

⁴² This recalls Apuleius' own feeling of being stricken "dumb" in *Apologia*, § 64-65.

⁴³ Osborne, 46

Indeed, just the opposite is the case for Lucius. He is “reincarnated” in an animal body because of his questioning and *curiositas*, and this animal form actually enhances his ability to understand and think critically about situations. Because he is perceived to be a ‘dumb beast,’ his various captors speak freely around him, not realizing that he comprehends and can act on the information they unwittingly give him. Indeed, though Lucius is an animal, his position on the fringes of action and humanity allows him to be far more perceptive of events.⁴⁴

Lucius eventually adapts to his condition enough to communicate with his human and exploitative master in a sort of sign language (*Met.* 10.17). His ability to communicate, even in such a rudimentary manner, removes him from the rest of his four-legged compatriots, and his other human traits further separate him. In some ways, he is beginning a slow return to normal human appearance, galvanized by an apparently accommodating environment, which is ultimately too accommodating. While Thiasus accedes to Lucius' desires and even procures for him sexual gratification, it is all for his own profit, and thus, while Lucius is treated humanly, but not humanely, in fact he is more exploited than ever. The fact that he is so close to humanity makes all the worse the fact that he is plainly denied human treatment in this scenario. He realizes that this is the case when his exploitation is about to be made a public spectacle, treatment which he does not wish to repeat, certainly not after his unpleasant experience with the Festival of Laughter in the third book. His progression towards humanity is galvanized by the prospect of repeating a degrading moment from his human past, and Lucius at last frees

⁴⁴ Another particularly perceptive mythical animal is Odysseus' old hunting dog, Argos who, in book seventeen of the *Odyssey*, is the first to recognize his long missing master, dying immediately thereafter

himself. The near-humanity of this situation is even more striking, making him aware of the fact that, despite his parlor tricks, he is perceived to be entirely animal. The irony of this situation is further compounded by the fact that he is treated no better or worse than a human slave. Further analyzing the divisions between humans, animals, and slaves, is the Roman scholar, Varro's distinction between tools, noting "*The instruments by which the soil is cultivated*: Some men divide these into three categories: (1) articulate instruments, i.e., slaves; (2) inarticulate instruments, i.e., Oxen; and (3) mute instruments, i.e., carts..."⁴⁵ Thus slaves are marginally more advanced than animals, and animals themselves only slightly elevated above the carts they pull. Varro distinguishes the 'instruments' by their levels of articulation, noting that animals are "inarticulate," implying that they may think, but their thoughts are poorly expressed.

Once his speech is restored to him, he is hesitant to use his regained ability. This, like other parts of Lucius' journey, echoes Ovid's narration of the myth of Io, unfortunately turned into a cow and similarly deprived of her ability to speak. According to Finkelpearl,

Most important, neither newly restored human dares to speak, despite having greatly regretted the inability earlier. Lucius is as silent as he was when actually deprived of a voice ("tacitus"...), and Io is afraid to speak lest she moo... Throughout the stories of both Lucius and Io, the struggle to speak or at least to communicate nonverbally has been central...Loss of voice and loss of identity are mutually dependent...⁴⁶

However, though the loss of voice denies the animal/human characters the ability to identify themselves verbally, they do not lose their identity in the sense of self-awareness. Both Io and Lucius are perfectly aware of their identities, and Io in particular

⁴⁵ Varro (Transl. by Jo-Ann Shelton). "*On Agriculture* 1.17.1, 3-5,7." *As the Romans Did; A Sourcebook in Roman Social History, Second Edition*. New York. Oxford University Press. 1998. 172.

⁴⁶ Finkelpearl. 191-192

spends a great deal of her time as cow attempting to convey her identity to those around her:

She licked her father's hand, cow-kissed his palms;/ her tears rolled down; if only words would come, / She'd speak her name, tell all, implore their aid. / For words her hoof traced letters in the dust-- / I, O—sad tidings of her body's change. / "Alas, alack!" Her father cried, and clasped/ the moaning heifer's horns and snow-white neck/ "... You give no answer; / silent, but from your heart so deep a sigh! / A moo—all you can say--- is your reply!"⁴⁷

The recognition restores her identity, and her father knows that she is still Io, even if her physical appearance does not match her previous visage. Lucius does not necessarily try to identify himself as 'Lucius,' but instead strives for recognition of his humanity when the time suits. In his situation, as well as for Io, there are times when it is patently unsafe for their human side to be known, leaving them both to wander in their quadrupedal state. As an animal, Lucius' external silence is incongruous with his internal narration. Finkelpearl notes that there is an odd disconnect between Lucius' dual roles as a narrator, or *auctor*, and as an actor⁴⁸ in his adventures: "Lucius-*auctor* devotes a great deal of space to eloquent retrospective incoherence. Lucius-*actor* is presented as wondering silently, in a series of indirect questions, *quid potissimum praeferar primarium, unde nouae uocis exordium caperem, quo sermone nunc renta lingua felicius auspicarer, quibus quantisque uerbis tantae deae gratis agerem* (11.14.2)."⁴⁹ After his re-transformation to human form, Lucius becomes a devotee of Isis and, in an instance of art imitating life on Apuleius' part, also becomes an "advocate in the law court of Rome, and, as the narrator of his own adventures, he clearly is quite eloquent. Thus, the absence

⁴⁷ Ovid (Translated by A.D. Melville) *Metamorphoses*. "Io". New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. 1.644-655

⁴⁸ John J. Winkler's book, *Auctor and Actor: a Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, analyzes the lines between acting and narrating, as well as the intricacies of various readings of Apuleius' text.

⁴⁹ Finkelpearl, 193

of a voice is all the more painful, and the emphasis on attempted speech or alternate forms of communication is all the greater."⁵⁰ Lucius makes up for his time without speech by becoming a lawyer, taking up a career centered upon eloquence and loquaciousness.

Within Plato's works, the importance of animals and the degree of their interactions with humans varies. The *Protagoras* describes a version of the creation myth in which Epimetheus is responsible for distributing the abilities to all the new creatures on the earth, giving animals various balancing powers, but neglecting humans until the end. In order to compensate for the fact that "while the other animals were well provided with everything, the human race was naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed..."⁵¹

Prometheus famously steals:

...from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the practical arts together with fire (without which this kind of wisdom is effectively useless) and gave them outright to the human race.... And it is from this origin that the resources human beings needed to stay alive came into being... it is said because humans had a share of the divine dispensation that they alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected altars and sacred images. It wasn't long before they were articulating speech and words and had invented houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets, and were nourished by food from the earth....⁵²

Thus humans have a certain affinity for deities because, according to this myth, humanity springs not only from divine will, but also from divine wisdom. This wisdom is intended to make up for the disparity in physical ability between animals and humanity, and first and foremost results in the development of religion, followed afterwards by speech and other hallmarks of human civilization. In this way animals are distanced from humanity,

⁵⁰ Finkelpearl 193. Translation: "I did not know what would be most appropriate to say first, where to find opening words for my new-found voice, what speech to use in making an auspicious inaugural of my tongue now born anew, or with what grand words to express my gratitude to so great a goddess."

⁵¹ *Protagoras*, 321c

⁵² *Protagoras*, 321d-322a

but in human society's strict striations, they are oddly connected to men in the frequent literary and cultural associations between animals and human slaves.

Plato casually notes this correlation in the *Republic IV*, discussing the nature of courage, denying those two groups the ability to be courageous: "I assume that you don't consider the correct belief about these same things, which you find in animals and slaves, and which is not the result of education, to be inculcated by law, and that you don't call it courage but something else."⁵³ It is unthinkable that while slaves are identical to their masters in all but status, they should possess the higher moral fiber so valued, but that they and animals lack not only core qualities, but also the potential to improve their spirit. Heath notes that within the boundaries of a somewhat archetypal Greek hero's quest, the hero would have

...evoked explorations, as well as justifications and reinforcements, of the differences between men and women, Greeks and non-Greeks, slave and free. And I suggest that underlying this pursuit of self-undertaking through juxtaposition is the Greek assumption of the necessity of maintaining a basic but potentially evanescent duality of human and non-human animals.⁵⁴

The duality between slave and master is parallel to that of animal and human, and preserving the distinction in both would have been equally important for the ancient psyche. Lucius is, once more, a complicated amalgam of these dualities. Towards the end of his journey, he is sold to a mill and regards his fellow beasts as "initiated into this slavery,"⁵⁵ but soon finds himself in their ranks. Again, though he is superficially in the situation of an enslaved animal, he is "acute and sensible as ever [and...] declined to submit tamely to this apprenticeship. Though, when I was a man among men, I had often

⁵³ *Republic* 4.430b

⁵⁴ Heath, 23

⁵⁵ *Metamorphoses* 9.11

seen this sort of machinery in operation, I now pretended to have no experience or knowledge of such work... my cleverness got me nowhere—far from it...”⁵⁶ In this situation, Lucius believes that he may be the better for embracing an animal’s perceived ignorance, but is unable to find reprieve either as a clever human or an ignorant animal slave.

Though animals are treated poorly, they are not entirely unequal in Plato’s eyes. While neo-Platonists would deny that human souls could merge with animals,⁵⁷ Plato himself allows for them to see the Forms and to pass that knowledge to humans. The end of *Republic X*, for instance, details the myth of Er. Socrates relates Er’s observation that “the way in which the souls choose their lives was a sight worth seeing, since it was pitiful, funny, and surprising to watch. For the most part, their choice depended upon the character of their former life.”⁵⁸ After relating the motivations behind the choices of various mythical characters, choosing continues: “still other souls changed from animals into human beings, or from one kind of animal into another, with unjust people changing into wild animals, and just people into tame ones, and all sorts of mixtures occurred.”⁵⁹ This myth not only serves to ascribe various degrees of justice to levels of domesticity, but also serves to imbue people and animals with a sense of free will. Because they are allowed to choose their initial path, living creatures willingly bind themselves to their lots in life. Lucius’ own transformation echoes this myth, though his attempt to choose an animal form to escape the bounds of human society has a somewhat more unfortunate effect. In book eight of the *Republic*, Plato maintains that freedom

⁵⁶ *Metamorphoses* 9.11

⁵⁷ Heath, 7 (Note 22)

⁵⁸ *Republic* 10.620a

⁵⁹ *Republic* 10.620d

under democracies is equally dangerous for humans and for animals, encouraging anarchy in both:

No one who hasn't experienced it would believe how much freer domestic animals are in a democratic city than anywhere else. As the proverb says, dogs become like their mistresses; horses and donkeys are accustomed to roam freely and proudly along the streets, bumping into anyone who doesn't get out of their way; and all the rest are equally full of freedom.⁶⁰

According to Plato, freedom is so intoxicating that it trickles down through all facets of society, causing children to rebel against their elders and even animals to forget their place in society. While rebellious children are unwanted, there is something sinister about the animals that are ignoring the boundaries between the animal slaves and human masters. In Plato's view, animal anarchy is a terrifying portent of the fundamental decay presented by democracies. Perhaps reacting to a deep-seeded fear of potential animal revolt, animals are not exempt from human laws. Though they cannot contribute to the creation of laws, animals are subject to human justice for their misdeeds as seen in *Laws* books nine and eleven. In this case:

If a beast of burden or any other animal kills anyone (except when the incident occurs while they are competing in one of the public contests), (i) *the relatives* must prosecute the killer for murder; (ii) *the next of kin* must appoint some Country-Wardens... and they must try the case: (iii) if the animal is found guilty, *they must* kill it and throw it out beyond the frontiers of the country.⁶¹

Even though animals, like human slaves, are denied rights in a modern understanding, or even the ability to have agency over their own fates, they are still responsible for conforming to the strictures of human society.

⁶⁰ *Republic* 8.563c

⁶¹ *Laws* 9.873e

Animal Spirituality

To human worshippers, the nature of the gods was mysterious at best, and they paid tribute to the various deities according to tradition and myth, hoping not to offend. After his escape to the Carthaginian seashore, Lucius prays to many goddesses, hoping that one of them will answer his supplication. He is unsure to whom he should address his prayers, perhaps further confused by his quasi-animal state. Speaking to the confusion over the nature of the gods, the sixth century Greek philosopher Xenophanes stated "...if horses or oxen or lions had hands/ or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, / horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen/and they would make the bodies/ of the sort which each of them had."⁶² Lucius, however, is still somewhere between humanity and bestiality, and he prays to an Egyptian goddess, part of a pantheon that is regularly depicted as being partly or wholly animal. Lucius' confusion about his identity is mirrored in his confused prayer and reflected back at him in Isis' response. She tells him in his dream that she is

Moved by [his] entreaties: I, mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, first-born of the ages, highest of the gods, queen of the shades, first of all those who dwell in heaven, representing in one shape all gods and goddesses... The Phrygians, first-born of mankind, call me the Pessinuntian Mother of the gods; the native Athenians the Cecropian Minerva; the island-dwelling Cypriots Paphian Venus; the archer Cretans Dictynnan Diana; the triple-tongued Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine; the ancient Eleusinians, Actean Ceres; some call me Juno, some Belona, others Hecate, others Rhamnusia; but both races of Ethiopians... and the Egyptians who excel in ancient learning, honour me with the worship which is truly mine and call me by my true name: Queen Isis." (*Met.* 11.5)

Thus, out of all the peoples who worship an Isis-like goddess, only the Egyptians recognize her 'true' identity, making it fitting that only the Egyptian goddess would

⁶² Xenophanes of Colophon (Transl. by J.H. Leshner). *Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary by J. H. Leshner*. Toronto. University of Toronto Press. 1992. Fragment 15, p. 25

recognize Lucius' own true identity. Lucius no doubt identifies with the multi-faceted/faced goddess because he too juggles multiple identities. In this way, his prayer, while not conjuring a donkey-goddess as Xenophanes might have expected, summons a goddess who reflects the most integral part of Lucius' identity, namely his identity crisis.

By Apuleius' own time period, Aristotle's attitudes had taken hold, and the requirement of speech evolves into the need for logic and reasoning. The third- and fourth-century BCE thinkers put forth the idea that still pervades modern human thought, namely that "man possesses the faculty of reason (*logos*) and other animals do not. Humans alone have *logos*, and this assumption in turn shaped the subsequent examination of the various characteristics associated with rationality, such as beliefs, perception, memory, intention, self-consciousness, etc."⁶³ Under this framework, Lucius is still somewhere between man and animal. He does indeed have the power of reasoning and the subsequent faculties of self-awareness, planning, and analysis, but he lacks the ability to verbally express these traits. If these are the only requirements for humanity, however, Lucius' encounter in the stable with the vengeful horse and mule causes further problems. These animals, though not necessarily recognizing Lucius the donkey as the man who had previously fed them, do perceive him as a threat to their own interests, and come together to attack him. In this case, the animals are imbued with agency but like Lucius himself, lack the ability to communicate their thoughts in a way recognizable to humans.

Plato's *Phaedrus*, a dialogue key to the discussion of the soul, also provides a relevant story of animal divinity in telling the myth of the cicadas and the story of Pan. In

⁶³ Heath, 6-7

this episode, Plato “has turned the Pan myth upside down... we have here an example of Plato rewriting traditional myth to conform with his own metaphysics. Popular myth portrays the gods in general, and Pan in particular, as a source of evil.”⁶⁴ Pan is the only Greek god to possess animal characteristics, perhaps a contributing factor to his unfortunate role as a troublesome god to be feared. Indeed, Pan hails from Arcadia, a region of the Peloponnesus, “A landscape [that] harkens back to a time before men were appropriately distinguished from the animals, a time when the gulf between gods and men was not so wide. (He is portrayed, after all, as part-human, part-beast).”⁶⁵ While Socrates and Phaedrus lounge outside the walls of Athens, Socrates relates the myth of the cicadas, in this case, men who have been transformed into insects “as a punishment for their excesses, and once transformed, the cicadas turn out to be two-faced: if they so desire, they can bestow a gift up on mortals by endearing them to the Muses, however, the Muse-inspired song they sing is also malevolent, for it lures men away from philosophy.”⁶⁶ The “two-faced” nature of the cicadas reflects their dual nature if, like Lucius, they also have retained their humanity under their beastly visage. Their presence in this myth, along with the ambiguous half-animal god Pan, would not have been lost on Apuleius as he reflected a similar ambiguity in Lucius’ character.

The Mechanics of the Soul

Plato’s writings about the nature and the make-up of the soul (*psyche*) represented a fairly dramatic shift from the previously held Homeric conception of mindless shades

⁶⁴ Gottfried, Bruce (Ed. Gerald E. Press) *Plato’s Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*. Chapter 10, “Pan, the Cicadas, and Plato’s use of Myth in the *Phaedrus*.” Maryland. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1993. 182.

⁶⁵ Gottfried, 183

⁶⁶ Gottfried, 180

wandering in Hades for all eternity. While he was not alone in this new way of thinking about the soul, Plato's soul was dynamic, eternal, and deeply individual. Apuleius inherited this new perspective and incorporated it into *Metamorphoses*. Some critics, including S.J. Harrison, have discounted the Platonism apparent in the novel, such as "the allusions to the *Phaedrus* rather represent a splendid literary joke: in his darkly comic and sordid tale of adultery, black magic, and murder Apuleius recalls in the lower literary form of the novel the much more elevated Platonic treatment of love."⁶⁷ Once again, however, Harrison entirely misses the point. In believing that comedy and philosophy are mutually exclusive, he seems to embody the very snobbery of the soul that Apuleius slyly refutes in *Metamorphoses*. His knowledge of Platonic dialogues as well as other schools of thought helped Apuleius formulate his own unique theory of the soul.

According to Plato, the soul gained knowledge and could view the Forms, and pass on this knowledge to whatever physical entity it inhabited through the power of recollection.⁶⁸ Pythagorean thought also seems to have had a strong influence on the general conception and on Plato as well, a connection that is particularly strong in *Phaedo*.⁶⁹ Within this dialogue, "there are three serious arguments... for the immortality of the soul, but only one guarantees the immortality of an individual soul. This is the doctrine of recollection (*anamnesis*), which explains our knowledge on this earth by invoking the memory of our having seen the Forms in a discarnate stage."⁷⁰ Recollected knowledge can vary from the ability to do mathematical problems, as demonstrated in *Gorgias*, or in latent knowledge of the Forms, which the soul may have glimpsed. While

⁶⁷ Harrison, 256

⁶⁹ Clay, Diskin. *Platonic Questions: Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher*. University Park, PA. Pennsylvania State University Press. 2000. 203.

⁷⁰ Clay, 203-20

many of Plato's ideas about the soul appear to be constant, there are variations in different dialogues, sometimes given voice by sophists, other times by Socrates, or by various interlocutors. Though the mechanics of the soul may not remain constant through the entire Platonic canon, the concepts surrounding it would have tremendous effects on subsequent thinkers and religions. Apuleius was deeply affected by Plato's thought, as is reflected strongly in *Metamorphoses*, as well as in the Isaic cult he followed and that Lucius ultimately joins.

The actual appearance of the soul is, for obvious reasons, impossible to describe definitively, but Plato offers several symbolic interpretations in *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*. The most well known image of the Platonic soul is likely Socrates' description of the chariot of the soul found in *Phaedrus*. He encourages his young companion to

...liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer... to begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline. This means that chariot driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business.⁷¹

The driver of this mismatched pair must attempt to guide the horses high into the heavens to view the myriad Forms. This is a task that only the very best of souls can hope to accomplish, and even then they can only glimpse perfection before being dragged back to earth. The soul strives to return to that moment of truth and clarity, but is hindered, thus

...the conception of the soul set out in the Platonic dialogues is, like Diotima's demigod Eros, caught "in between" two states. As incarnate, the soul is described as a composite of three elements, and a healthy state of the soul is... a harmony of its three parts under the mastery of reason.⁷²

⁷¹ *Phaedrus* 264b

⁷² Clay, 201

The tripartite soul is also found in the fourth book of the *Republic*, in which “Socrates speaks of the parts of the soul as if they were instrumental: we learn with one part; we are angry with another; and we desire with a third.”⁷³ The interaction between these three ‘instruments’ likens the soul to an instrument, an apt comparison particularly when terms such as “‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ attach to the attunement and discord of the soul respectively. Even the distinctions that articulate Socrates’ conception of the soul as tripartite involve an ambiguity, for Socrates can speak of a human as being ‘in control himself’ or ‘superior to himself.’”⁷⁴ However these tripartite illustrations of the soul are shattered somewhat by the title character of the *Timaeus*, who describes the soul as a product of the mixing of a Demiurge, resulting in “reason... as the immortal part of the soul. From the ‘citadel’ of the head, it controls the spirited and emotional element housed in the chest...”⁷⁵ Timaeus’ description incorporates the physical needs and desires, attributing various functions to the organs. Though the soul is not depicted as tripartite in each of the dialogues,

...all soul, says Socrates, ‘cares for’ (*epimeleitai*) the inanimate; but whereas when the soul is ‘perfect’ (*telea*) it governs the cosmos as a whole, if it should lose its wings it falls to earth and becomes the motive force for only a single, mortal body (246b6-c6). Thus it is not only the human soul which changes other things—such as the human body—by virtue of its power to change itself (see 246c4); this activity is equally characteristic of the divine soul, albeit at a more cosmic level...⁷⁶

Thus the soul, while tripartite within the divine and the mortal, has different duties and goals. The mortal soul bears the more difficult burden of mediating between the “good” and “bad” horses of the chariot, while the divine, not burdened by the “bad” horse, is free to tour the heavens at its leisure. There is a further implication for the tripartite soul.

⁷³ Clay, 208

⁷⁴ Clay, 201

⁷⁵ Clay, 209

⁷⁶ Ferrari, G.R.F. *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato’s Phaedrus*. New York. Cambridge University Press. 1987. 126

namely: “because the psyche has three parts, ‘there are also... three pleasures, one peculiar to each part’ ([*Republic* 9] 580d7-8).”⁷⁷ These various pleasures are correlated with varying degrees of virtue, making each soul unique collectively, but also within its own three parts. Though the dialogues occasionally differ in the portrayal of the soul through different imagery, each makes the distinction between the physical body and the intangible soul, acknowledging that the two are bound to one another.

The most important and consistent trait of Plato’s soul, whether described as carnal or incarnate, is its immortality, a trait discussed extensively in both *Phaedo* and *Protagoras*. Apuleius’ translations of both of these works would have ensured his familiarity with these concepts, and have clearly influenced his writing in *Metamorphoses*. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates is facing imminent death and is explaining to some followers why he does not fear death, but rather embraces it. His sanguine attitude towards death is due in a large part to the fact that “in the *Phaedo* [and elsewhere], death is portrayed as the separation of the refined and intelligent soul from the heavy dull matter that encases it. The work of the philosopher is to prepare his soul for this separation.”⁷⁸ Thus the soul exists independent of the body, much like a passenger in a vehicle, being conveyed by the vehicle, but capable of emerging and acting outside of it without any harm. This corporeal carriage gives motivation to the soul, indeed,

By its nature of being earthbound and bound to the body, the soul is in constant motion and, like the divided self in Aristophanes' myth in the *Symposium*, desires its complement, the static, and its mirror image in the Ideas. The embodied soul cannot be self-sufficient and divinely immobile. It strives to return to a vision seen in its discarnate state.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Reeve, C.D.C. *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press. 1988.144.

⁷⁸ Clay, 203

⁷⁹ Clay, 205

The notion that the soul is constantly chafing at its physical container is inherently Socratic, and also brings up the incredibly pertinent topic of desire, or *eros*.

Aristophanes' tale from the *Symposium* describes the soul as being in a constant search for its 'soul mate' or 'other half.' That dialogue and the *Phaedrus* are deeply concerned with the nature of love and desire, both of which impact the nature and well being of the soul. Within the *Phaedrus*, Socrates is engaging an attractive young man and object of his affection in a discussion on the nature of *eros* and the soul, or *psyche*. His argument in that dialogue is:

...advanced as an illustration of the nature of *eros*. It occurs in Socrates' speech in praise of passionate love (*eros*) and its divine madness, his so-called palinode. Formally, it can be made to look like a categorical syllogism. It begins with its conclusion: "All soul is immortal." Its demonstration (articulated in twelve steps) depends on establishing the truth of two propositions: (1) what moves itself is immortal; (2) what constitutes a beginning is ungenerated and therefore indestructible. Since the Socratic concept fulfills the requirements of (1) moving itself and (2) constituting the beginning of movement in something else (the body), the soul is shown to be immortal.⁸⁰

Within this construction, the soul is an active driver of the body-vehicle, and desire is a strong driving force for both the body and the immortal soul. The balance between desire, body, and soul is a delicate one in Socrates' mind, and it is impossible to make a clean break between them. Indeed, the soul is constantly yearning and being driven, not "from the unconscious, or the 'id' (*das Es*) as Freud would later have it. [The soul's drive] comes from the perception of a need that translates into desire. We know from the *Symposium* that love (*eros*) is the symptom of an absence and a desire for what is absent... [and when] Socrates defines love (*eros*) for Phaedrus, he defines it as a

⁸⁰ Clay, 205

desire...⁸¹ This connection between love and desire these motives with the soul is vital. However, it is too simplistic to say that physicality is the only thing driving the soul. The factors of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, as well as finding contentment in the state between the two extremes, are also strong motivators for individuals, but these terms are fairly loose. According to C.D.C. Reeve, “even though the calm state between pleasure and pain is pleasant when it follows pain, and painful when it follows pleasure, ‘there is nothing sound about these appearances so far as the truth about pleasure is concerned [*pros hedones aletheian*], but they are a kind of illusion’ ([*Republic IX*] 584a9-10).”⁸² While this middling place might be mistaken for a sense of harmony, it is merely a temporary substitute for each pleasure sought by each part of the soul. These three parts with their three distinct desires provide “a unified source of motivation urging the psyche towards a distinctive kind of pleasure, and representing that pleasure as the content of the good.”⁸³ In seeking ‘the good’ the soul is forced to harmonize between the three drives. This harmony may be achieved in flickers,

But human harmony is transient, as the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, who created these harmonies, knew: everything that has been bound together can one day be loosened. The three elements of the soul can be dissolved in formal analysis, and our inner conflicts show that they are not always in tune. The characterization of appetites, desires, passions, and love in the Platonic dialogues makes it apparent that all the elements of the Platonic soul are motivated by something lacking; they do not receive their energy solely from the power of bodily appetite or sexual desire.⁸⁴

According to Plato, this give and take between the different parts of the soul is the fabric of existence. A person is driven by a constant attempt to balance these elements of the soul, reconciling the immediate earthly desires with a yearning for the recollected Forms.

⁸¹ Clay, 206

⁸² Reeve, 147

⁸³ Reeve, 153

⁸⁴ Clay, 210

Socrates feels the need to constantly repress the urge to act upon these physical drives, but can never remove the urge, as it constitutes a fundamental force. The best he can hope for is some sort of balance between the desire that is inextricable from his soul. He does this by attempting to focus that *eros* on a different subject, namely the impossible quest for knowledge.

Socrates appears to sublimate his physical desires into a quest for pure knowledge, attributing that same quest to all souls, but particularly to the souls of philosophers. In the *Republic*, Plato describes the ideal government as a state ruled by a so-called Philosopher King, or someone schooled in philosophical thought and abhors the thought of ruling. He and others like him are unique in that they demonstrate that “not all passions of the human soul are social. The passions of the mind are directed to the truth and the divine, and the philosopher who has known these returns to the city only reluctantly.”⁸⁵ Philosopher kings are idealized and fantastic products of wishful thinking. In this framework, the ideal person should convert his physical desires into a desire for pure wisdom. Unfortunately, “as a theory of desire, Plato’s presentation of *eros* in the *Republic*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus* is one of constant human frustration, and on all three of its levels the soul reads like a fable of unrequited love.”⁸⁶ Even in an ideal world, the soul is frustrated in its quest for perfect wisdom.

Regarding *Metamorphoses*, much academic hay has been made over the Platonic overtones of the Eros and Psyche myth of books four through six, particularly given the characters’ names.⁸⁷ These are not idle comparisons, and there is obviously an allegorical

⁸⁵ Clay, 207

⁸⁶ Clay, 209

⁸⁷ *Eros* meaning love or desire, in this case representing Venus’ son, Cupid, and Psyche meaning soul.

reason for the myth's inclusion. The intimate but unorthodox relationship between the two characters is plainly representative of the similarly complex relationship between physical desires and the purity of the soul. Nancy Shumate notes:

For obvious reasons, the tale of Cupid and Psyche traditionally has been read as a Platonic allegory. There is in evidence, after all, an overarching scheme of the soul's ascent to an abstract transcendent realm and a suggestion that this is accomplished when erotic or desiderative energies that have been dissipated on transient objects are now harnessed and directed toward that realm. This is, of course, the subject in particular of the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. In addition, certain details of the Apuleian text seem deliberately to echo Platonic passages.⁸⁸

While Shumate concedes this, she is reluctant to attribute much motivation to the allegorical exercise except to say "the *Metamorphoses*, which represents a search whose telos is Isis qua representative transcendent deity."⁸⁹ Psyche is, in this case, yearning for knowledge, but the knowledge is of a physical nature, namely the identity of her husband. In a direct parallel to Lucius' story, her *curiositas* gets her into trouble and, after seeing too much, she is forced to wander the earth. Like Lucius, she becomes a slave,⁹⁰ is forced to perform menial and physically exacting chores, and is eventually rescued by divine intervention. Psyche is obviously not a pure philosopher's soul, but one that is still, in a Socratic sense, 'tainted' by earthly desires. Even after she is saved and deified, literally placed in the stars with the gods, she is still not free of physical desires as she gives birth to Cupid's child, *Voluptas*, or Pleasure. If mapping the journey of Lucius' soul onto the journey of Psyche, the soul embodied, one may initially be somewhat dissatisfied with the results, namely that the two do not seem particularly elevated by their quests.

Harrison believes that "Lucius is not fundamentally improved as a character by his

⁸⁸ Shumate, Nancy. *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press. 1996.. 209.

⁸⁹ Shumate, 261

⁹⁰ The jealous goddess Venus, exacts punishment over Psyche, perhaps illustrating the damage physical desire can do to a soul.

experiences, and does not gain wisdom or insight into the true nature of the world, for at the end of the novel he plainly remains a gullible dupe... [suggesting] that the novel is not fundamentally concerned with advocating the doctrines and values of Platonism..."⁹¹

However he and others of that opinion are missing Apuleius' true point. While Apuleius absorbs much of Plato's model of the soul, he rejects the more Socratic dogma regarding the degrading nature of the physical. Apuleius accepts that it is impossible, even for the most learned philosopher or, in this case, the embodiment of the soul, to be separated from physical desires or pleasures. By accepting this fact, he strives for more of a balance between the body and the mind, allowing Psyche/ the soul to produce Pleasure after her ascension, and allowing for the imperfection of religion.

Conclusion: A "Milesian discourse" Comes to an End

It would be unfair to say that Plato has the sole influence over Apuleius' thoughts and writings, but it is particularly untenable to deny him any role in *Metamorphoses*. However, while Apuleius was surely influenced by countless philosophies and religions, he appears to most closely identify with Plato, tempering his predecessor's ideas with his own. Though Socrates was prosecuted for impiety and heartily, but unsuccessfully, argued against those claims, Apuleius appears to have maintained a veneer of piety, masking his inner discontent. Episodes such as Lucius' trial during the festival of Laughter and his encounters with money-grubbing priests after his conversion to the cult of Isis, both of which are highly reflective of Apuleius' own life, seem to point to the author's disillusionment with the established religions of the time. In book three, Apuleius obliquely shows his discomfort not only by the perversion of justice, but also by

⁹¹ Harrison, 225

the entirely false promises of the magistrates acting as priests. He echoes this sentiment in the eleventh book, portraying poor Lucius as being in the thrall of the priests, happily handing over life savings and family fortunes to achieve the next level of initiation. While some may argue that these encounters, as well as the 'tainted' Psyche episode, illustrate that Apuleius is clearly aiming at a purely entertaining novel with no redeeming values, this interpretation would neglect another more likely intent. Though Apuleius certainly is not above a vulgar joke or cheap laugh, he shows in his novel and in his defense speech that there is something deeply dissatisfying about the accepted hard line of religion and philosophy. Strict physical asceticism is not a prerequisite for a soul's purity, as illustrated by the Psyche myth. Indeed, Apuleius seems to be promoting a harmony for the soul, a balance between earthly reality and spiritual enlightenment.

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